A LETTER

FROM

MONS. DE VOLTAIRE

TO THE AUTHOR OF THE

ORPHAN OF CHINA.

Audi alteram partem.

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Monſ. De VOLTAIRE's

LETTER, &c.

SIR,

I Am ſurprized, that in a Letter addreſſed to an Exile who has been long out of his Country, and has no Proſpect of ever returning to it again, you ſhould ſay that your Writing to me will carry with it the Appearance of correſponding with the Enemy: I may at preſent ſay with *Luſignan*,

"*A revoir* Paris *je ne puis plus pretendre.*"

I am now near ſeventy Years of Age, and the next Voyage I make will, in all Probability, be to the Country 'from whoſe Bourne no Traveller returns,' to uſe the Expreſſion of a great Poet of your Nation, whoſe Beauties I admire, perhaps, more than you, tho' I cannot avoid ſeeing his Defects. But it adds ſtill more to my Surpriſe, that you ſhould treat me as the declared Adverſary of *Engliſh* Literature, when it is well known that I firſt introduced a Taſte for *Engliſh* Authors in *France*, firſt excited the Curioſity of my Countrymen, and inſpired them with a Deſire to become acquainted with the literary Productions of the *Britiſh* Nation. I firſt had the Courage to break thro' the deſpicable and pedantic Veneration for Antiquity; I ſtem'd the Torrent of Prejudice, and ſhewed miſguided *France*, that better Models in every Species of Compoſition

ſition might be found amongſt their Neighbours, whoſe Manners they might ſtudy, and whoſe Performances they might ſee, than from the Rubbiſh of dead Languages, Languages which we can no longer pronounce, Languages which afford us no Inſight into human Nature, and which ſhould be confined to the Cloyſters of pedantic Obſcurity. This ungenerous Reflection, backed by ſome Paſſages which you cite from my Works, and by a malignant Miſrepreſentation, make them expreſs what never came into my Thoughts, beſpeaks a narrow prejudiced Mind; and when I conſider it, together with many loſe and virulent Strokes which drop from you in the Courſe of your very polite Epiſtle, I cannot help recollecting thoſe emphatical Lines of the late Mr. *Dryden:*

" In thy ſelonious Heart tho' Venom lies,
" It does but touch thy *Iriſh* Pen and dies."

Perhaps I have here made a Miſtake concerning your Country, but you own yourſelf to be an obſcure Iſlander, and I am conſcious that I never gave the Appellation of obſcure Iſlanders to the *Engliſh*. Sir, do but give yourſelf the Trouble to read my Works with a little more Attention, than you ſeem to have done, and you will find I never let paſs any Occaſion of praiſing the *Engliſh* Nation, a Nation which has diſtinguiſhed itſelf ſo eminently in Arts and Arms, and which you, notwithſtanding your affected Patriotiſm, ſeem to have a ſecret Animoſity againſt. You proceed to give me an Account of your Piece, and to aſſign your Reaſons for departing from my Plan, in doing which you have made ſeveral Strictures upon my *Orphelin de la Chine*, with all the Severity of a Critic by Profeſſion; for this I muſt acknowledge myſelf highly obliged to you;

thoſe

thoſe that ſhew me the Defects of my Productions, do me more Service than thoſe that beſtow fulſome and inſipid Eulogiums on them; ſuch as, what is a Beauty in *Racine*, ſeems in his great Succeſſor to be a Blemiſh, and ſuch Scenes are generally found dull and unawakening by the Audience, even tho' adorned with all the Graces of ſuch Compoſitions as yours, of which it is but Juſtice to ſay, that it beſtows Embelliſhments upon every Subject. Sir, I aſſure you, I am much better pleaſed with your Criticiſms than your Panegyrics, however zealous; and in order to make ſome Return for the Obligations you have laid me under thereby, I ſhall proceed to conſider your Piece with that Candour, which I always have endeavoured to ſhew in deſcanting upon Works of Genius.

The

The firſt Act opens with a Scene between *Mirvan* and *Mandane*. This *Mirvan* is of great Service to you in bringing about the Plot, and to make the Part he bears in it appear probable. We are told in the *Dramatis Perſonæ*, that he is a *Chineſe* in the *Tartars* Service, ſecretly a Friend to *Zamti*: This Account muſt be allowed to be highly ſatisfactory, and it would certainly be mere cavilling, to enquire by what Means a *Chineſe*, ſecretly a Friend to *Zamti*, could obtain ſuch Credit with the Emperor. But to illuſtrate this farther, I ſhall beg Leave to cite a few Paſſages from your firſt Scene.

" *Mirvan*.

I hope *Mandane*
Doubts not my honeſt Zeal----full
well you know
I bear this Tyrant deep and mortal
Hate;

That

That under him I liſt, and wear this
Garb,
In Hopes that ſome Occaſion may
arrive,
When I may ſtrike an unexpected
Blow,
And do my Country Right.

" *Mandane.*

Thy Loyalty,
Thy Truth, and Honour have been
ever ſpotleſs.
Beſides thy Wrongs, thy countleſs
Wrongs, the Wounds
He gave your injur'd Family and
Name,-----

" *Mirvan.*

Alas! thoſe Wounds muſt ſtill lie
bleeding here,
Untented by the Hand of Time----
not all
His lenient Arts, his Favours heap'd
upon me,

Shall

Shall cool the burning Anguiſh of
my Soul.
What, he that ſlew my Father!
dragg'd my Siſter,
Blooming in Years to his deteſted Bed!
Yes, Tyrant, yes; thy unextinguiſh'd
Foe
Dwells in this Boſom, *&c.*----"

Theſe Paſſages ſtill aggravate the Abſurdity. The rough northern Conqueror *Timurkan* muſt have wanted common Senſe, to truſt a Man whom he had outraged in ſo cruel a Manner; for it does not appear what Motive he could have for laviſhing Favours upon an Enemy he had injured: It certainly could not be from a Compunction of Humanity, which does not appear to be the *Tartar*'s moſt diſtinguiſhing Characteriſtic.

It muſt be acknowledged, that the extenſive Conqueſts of the *Tartar* were

were more owing to blind and barbarous Force, than to Conduct and Policy; but ſurely, ſurely 'tis too much to repreſent him as acting like a downright Idiot. Such a Conduct in *Timurkan* would have been a practical Bull, which, tho' it might have been expected from one of the antient Kings of a certain obſcure weſtern Iſland, ſeems an Incongruity in the Character of an *Aſiatick* Hero. In your ſecond Act, in the Scene in which *Mandane*, in a Tranſport of Grief, comes to expoſtulate with her Huſband upon the cruel Reſolution he had taken with Regard to her Son, *Zamti*, tired out with her Importunities, at laſt bids her very cavalierly go and proſtitute herſelf to the Conqueror.

Then let thoſe Eyes,
Thoſe faded Eyes, which Grief for me has dimm'd,

With guilty Joy re-animate their
Luſtre,
To brighten Slavery, and beam their
Fires
On the fell *Scythian* Murderer." P. 33.

It muſt appear highly natural, that a grave and religious Mandarine ſhould expreſs himſelf in ſuch Terms as theſe. To this polite Reproach, the virtuous *Mandane* anſwers like a Nymph that had been born and educated in *Drury-Lane*:

" And is it thus,
Thus is *Mandane* known? My Soul
diſdains
The vile imputed guilt.---No---never---never---
Still am I true to Fame." *Ibid.*

No, never---never---ſtill am I true to Fame: Theſe Expreſſions cannot be better reduced to Proſe than by

thoſe Phraſes uſual in the Mouths of Ladies that ſee Company: Sir, you're quite miſtaken in me---I am none of thoſe---I vow I'll call my Huſband, &c. &c. That you ſhould be acquainted with the Language of ſuch Ladies of Condition is not at all ſurpriſing, as you were (if I am not miſinformed) an hired Actor both at *Drury-Lane* and *Covent-Garden*. How I came to the Knowledge of their Idiom I may, perhaps, inform you upon ſome other Occaſion. At the Cloſe of this Scene, *Mandane*, in the Exceſs of Grief, falls into a Swoon; her Huſband, inſtead of expreſſing that Anguiſh and Diſtraction, which might be expected from him in ſuch a Situation, ſays coldly, Where is *Arſace?*

His calling *Arſace* to his Wife's Aſſiſtance, and that, in ſuch Terms, puts me in Mind of *Peachum*'s Be-

haviour, when his Wife ſwoons away in your *Beggar's Opera:* I think, to make the Reſemblance compleat, he ſhould have ſent *Arſace* for a Glaſs of ſtrong Waters to revive his Wife's Spirits. Your Talents for Eloquence and Expreſſion, ſeem to be of a Piece with your Conduct and Skill in the Contrivance of a Fable; there occurs a notable Inſtance of this in your third Act.

"*Octar.*

The Sabre's Edge
Thirſts for his Blood----then let it's
Lightnings fall
On his aſpiring Head.---" P. 45.

This Jumble of Metaphors certainly produces a moſt wonderful Effect. None but a moſt daring and extraordinary Genius would have ventured to paſs ſo ſuddenly from one Image to the other. The Tranſition

is

is more than *Pindarick* from Thirſt to Lightning; perhaps you may have had an Eye to the Aphoriſm of *Socrates*, ſo much Thunder muſt needs Produce a Shower, but it ſeems you have thought proper to invert it. In the ſame Act *Timurkan*, who has Penetration enough to perceive, that *Mandane* is in Earneſt when ſhe declares that *Hamet* is her Son,

" In her wild Vehemence of Grief
I hear
The genuine Voice of Nature."

Soon after deviates again into his Character of Idiotiſm, it ſhould ſeem that, if he had had Diſcernment enough to form a right Judgment of *Mandane*'s Behaviour, he ſhould at the ſame Time, have Sagacity enough to let his Suſpicions fall upon *Etan*, who had been educated by the *Mandarine* as his Son. If we acquit *Timurkan*

murkan of Idiotiſm upon this Occaſion, I don't ſee how the Author can eſcape the Charge. At the Cloſe of the Act the Tyrant orders *Zamti*, *Mandane*, and *Hamet*, to Priſon, not forgetting *Etan*, whom he does not yet ſuſpect to be the Perſon he wanted, tho' *Zamti* had juſt owned *Hamet* to be his Son: This Circumſtance, however, would have ſtruck any one but a *Tartarian* Hero, drawn by an *Hibernian* Poet. It muſt be ſtill further obſerved, to put the Policy of the renowned Conqueror in the cleareſt Light, that he commits the Priſoners to the Care of his Favourite *Mirvan*, whoſe whole Family he had butchered, but I might juſtly be charged with being Hypocritical, ſhould I enquire any farther how he came to put ſuch Confidence in a Perſon, who had ſuch cogent Reaſons to be his implacable Enemy. Herein the Author has ſuſtained the Charac-

ter

ter of *Timurkan*, and we ſhall ſee in the laſt Act, that he has obſerved the Precept of *Horace* with regard to him,

"*Seructur ad imum qualis ab inceptu*
proceſſerit & ſibi conſtet."

He ſhews himſelf a compleat Idiot to the laſt.

In Act the Fourth, *Etan* acknowledges himſelf to be *Zaphimri*, in order to ſave *Zamti*, *Mandane* and *Hamet*; but the Tyrant orders him, as well as the other three, to be executed directly. It does not appear natural, that *Zaphimri* ſhould take ſuch a Step, when he might have availed himſelf of that Time to take Meaſures for the Reſcue of his Friends. One would be apt to think his Counſellor *Mirvan* as bad a Politician as the Monarch who truſted him. However,

ever, *Mirvan*, the uſeful *Mirvan*, having brought him off upon this Occaſion, in the next Act brings him armed with a Sabre, into the Preſence of the Tyrant who had demanded his Head. The *Tartar*, it ſeems, was defenceleſs, and *Zaphimri* tells him, that he could ſcorn him in that Situation, had it not been for the unnumbered Wrongs he had heaped upon him. It ſeems highly probable, that a Tyrant who lived in conſtant Diſtruſt, who knew that he was environed by Enemies, who was juſt then labouring under the moſt diſmal Apprehenſions, as appears from ſeveral Paſſages in the Play, and in particular, from the Dream, which he relates juſt before to *Oſtar*.

" On yonder Couch, ſoon as Sleep
clos'd my Eyes,
All that yon mad, enthuſiaſtic Prieſt,

In

In myſtic Rage denounc'd, roſe to
my View;
And ever and anon a livid Flaſh,
From Conſcience ſhot, ſhew'd to my
aching Sight
The Colours of my Guilt----
Billows of Blood were round me; and the Ghoſts,
The Ghoſts of Heroes by my Rage
deſtroy'd,
Came with their ghaſtly Orbs and
ſtreaming Wounds;
They ſtalk'd around my Bed;---with
loud Acclaim
They call'd *Zaphimri!* 'midſt the
Lightning's Blaze,
Heaven roll'd conſenting Thunders
o'er my Head;
Strait from his Covert the Youth
ſprung upon me, *&c.*" P.77.

It ſeems highly probable, I ſay, that a Tyrant in this Situation of Mind, ſhould be ſo inconſiderate as to go

unarmed: But *Timurkan* in this, and many other Reſpects, ſhews himſelf to be the very Reverſe of *Dionyſius*, the Tyrant of *Sicily*; nay, he ſeems to differ from all the tyrannical Conquerors, ſpoken of in Hiſtory, in one Particular, *viz.* in wanting common Senſe, a Quality which a Tyrant ſhould never be without, tho', it ſeems, Poets have a Charter for offending againſt it: At leaſt, the poetical Licences aſſumed by the Author of the *Engliſh Orphan of China*, would induce one to think that he imagines himſelf poſſeſſed of ſuch a Priviledge. This will appear in a ſtill ſtronger Light from the ſubſequent Paſſages: *Mirvan* rouſes the Courage of *Zaphimri* in theſe elegant Terms: Fall on my Prince. The brave *Timurkan*, however, is not wanting to himſelf; he has the Addreſs to ſnatch *Mirvan*'s Sabre. *Mirvan*, it ſeems, is as bad a Swordſman as *Timurkan* a Poli-

Politician: He ſeems, indeed, to have no great Head-piece as well as the Tyrant; or elſe, inſtead of ſtanding by as a Spectator of the Combat, he would have attacked *Timurkan* himſelf: Nay, there does not appear to be any Reaſon, why he ſhould not have diſpatched the Tyrant before, inſtead of amuſing him through two whole Scenes: But by theatrical Laws long ſince eſtabliſhed by Poets and Critics of a certain Order, his Death was due to *Zaphimri:* Poetical Juſtice would have been highly violated had he fallen by any other Hand. Then the Incident of *Mirvan*'s producing the Perſon of *Zaphimri* inſtead of his Head, has ſomething ſo ſtriking and well-imaged, that it is certainly cheaply bought at the Expence of a few Inconſiſtencies. But, to proceed, *Mirvan*, alarmed at the Prince's Danger, calls out for Help, the Combat begins, and *Za-*

phimri and the Tyrant go out fighting. Here I muſt own I do not ſee any Reaſon why the Combat ſhould not be decided on the Stage. This Circumſtance puts me in Mind of an Abſurdity in the *Horatii* of *Corneille*, which has been juſtly animadverted upon by Mr. *Addiſon*: *Horatius*, provoked by *Camilla*'s Imprecations againſt her Country, draws his Sword in Order to kill her: She betakes herſelf to flight, he purſues and ſtabs her between the Side-Scenes. This Circumſtance, as the judicious Author above-mentioned juſtly obſerves, greatly inhances the Cruelty of the Action of *Horatius*. *Corneille* was forced to this Abſurdity by the rigid Laws of the Theatre for which he wrote, which did not then allow of killing upon the Stage. This Cuſtom I have ſince introduced, Sir. It was always my Maxim to learn Reaſon and good Senſe by whomſo-

ever

ever taught; and I always thought it highly abſurd, that an Action of this Kind, whoſe Deciſion is momentary, ſhould not paſs before the Spectators. Why the Prince and *Timurkan* ſhould not decide their Difference upon the Spot does not ſeem ſo eaſy to determine. It ſhould ſeem that the *Tartar*'s Heart fails him, and this Conqueror, who, thro' the four firſt Acts of the Play appears to be a Fool, in the fifth turns out a Coward. This Impertinence of exeunt Fighting, ſeems exactly in the Style of Poet *Bays*. His Brother-Poet ſeems to have been led into it by an ill-judged Attempt, to imitate the *Greek* Dramatic Poets, who, when a Perſon is killed, repreſent the Action as paſſing within, while the Chorus that always continues upon the Stage, hears the Perſon attacked cry out for Mercy, and the other refuſing it with ſome ſuch Expreſſion as, " Thou haſt

ſhewn

ſhewn none;" *Sed nunc non erat hic locus.*

Zaphimri having ſlain the Tyrant, exults in his Victory with his Friend *Hamet*, who was juſt come to his Aſſiſtance: He then enquires after *Zamti* and *Mandane*, but *Mirvan* enters with a Look of wan Deſpair, and tells him:

" While here I trembled for the great Event,
The unrelenting Slaves, whoſe Trade is Death,
Began their Work.---Nor Piety, nor Age,
Could touch their felon Hearts---- They ſeiz'd on *Zamti*,
And bound him on the Wheel---All frantic at the Sight,
Mandane plung'd a Poignard in her Heart,
And at her Huſband's Feet expir'd."

This

This is all highly Theatrical no Doubt. I would here gladly aſk, however, what the Partizans of *Mirvan* and *Zaphimri* were about in this Emergency? How *Mirvan*, who, by a Sort of Enchantment, conveys *Zaphimri* and *Hamet* wherever he pleaſes, could not find Means to ſecure *Zamti* and *Mandane?* How the Tyrant, who had Guards at hand ſo ready to obey his orders, could not find Means to procure Succour? And, finally, how *Mirvan* could fine Means to blind thoſe Guards, and manage them at Will? We have had, indeed, a late Inſtance of a Monarch's being ſtabbed in the Midſt of his Courtiers and Guards, but the Aſſaſſin did not eſcape. But it ſeems highly incredible, that a King ſhould tamely let himſelf be butchered with his Guards within Call, and that, after ſo many Parlies and retarding Circumſtances, that he had ſufficient Time to provide

vide for his Security. The Death of *Zamti*, at laſt, cloſes this extraordinary Concatenation of probable Events. And now, Sir, upon this Review of your Piece, I believe very few will ſcruple to pronounce it a monſtrous Farce, to be equalled by none in Abſurdity, except by that of Poet *Bays* in the *Rehearſal*. The Force of Truth, Sir, obliges me to return the Compliment you make me; you have, I muſt own, Sir, conducted your Plan like a Poet.

" *Meum qui pectus inaniter angit*
Ut Magus.----"

The moſt irregular Plot of *Shakeſpear*'s is accurate in Compariſon of yours; and whilſt you have ſurpaſſed him in all his Defects, you have not attained to one of his Beauties. There is not a ſingle Scene in your Piece that can affect a Reader, altho' ſome of

of the particular Situations, notwithſtanding they are abſurdly introduced, afforded an Opportunity of touching the Paſſions. Your Language is poor frothy Play-houſe Cant, a miſerable Fuſtian-Style, or rather a wretched Patchwork, compoſed of the moſt turgid, far-fetched, and unnatural Expreſſions in Poems wrote in blank Verſe, and exploded Plays.

You tell me that a Scantineſs of intereſting Buſineſs is a primary Defect in my *Orphan of China:* This, indeed, cannot be objected to your Piece; there is Buſineſs and Stir enough in it, as *Bayes* ſays: But whether a ſimpler Plot would not be preferable to a complicated Intrigue, that runs counter to common Senſe and Probability, I leave every rational Reader to determine. You have brought a heavy Charge againſt *Gengiſcan*, in my *Orphan of China*, for being in Love, and talking Politics:

To your firſt Indictment I plead guilty, and make the ſame Defence which I have already done. In this Particular I conformed, Sir, to the vicious Taſte of my Age and Nation, as the great *Corneille* did before me, and as the illuſtrious *Shakeſpear* did long before either of us. I have acknowledged in many of my fugitive Pieces, Sir, that the Defects of that great Genius were entirely owing to a Compliance with the popular Taſte, as the Irregularity of *Homer*'s Plan was owing to the Rudeneſs of the Age in which he lived. I moreover compared your *Shakeſpear* to the great Father of Epic Poetry, for Strength and Sublimity of Genius, in my *Melange de Literature et Philoſophie*, but you, with a Candour worthy of Monſ. l'abbé *Freron*, and ſuch little Critics, paſs by every Circumſtance that proves me a Friend to the *Britiſh* Republic of Letters; and by the Artifice of ſelecting a few ſcattered Paſ-

ſages

ſages, and citing them apart from the Context, endeavour to make me paſs for its bittereſt Enemy. I muſt own that Expreſſion of le Chevalier *Gengiſcan*, as errant a Lover as ever ſighed in the *Thuilleries* at *Paris*, contains infinite Humour, and is altogether worthy of the facetious Author of the the *Grays-Inn Journal*, a Work that muſt be allowed to be unrivalled for true Pleaſantry, as well as for Correctneſs and Elegance of Stile. But to proceed, you tell me that I ſhall often *track you in my Snow*, as Mr. *Dryden* expreſſes it; here I cannot help inverting what I ſaid with Regard to the Abbé *Metaſtaſio*. Upon the preſent Occaſion, I muſt make the following Exclamation, *Ah le Bougre de Voleur il m'a diablement gaté!* You have yourſelf modeſtly owned, that you do not pretend to the Talent of embelliſhing, and I believe every judicious Reader will do you the Juſ-

tice to aſſent to this Aſſertion. When you take Notice that I have a particular Satisfaction in deſcanting on the the Faults of *Shakeſpear*, the greateſt Genius that has appeared ſince *Homer*, you ſhould have done me the Juſtice to add, that I criticiſe thoſe of *Homer* with equal Severity, and that I allow a Superiority of Genius to both, tho' I cannot avoid ſeeing their Defects.

It was quite unneceſſary, Sir, to beg me not to make your Piece my Criterion, whereby to decide concerning the Taſte of the *Engliſh* Nation, or the preſent State of Literature among your Countrymen. I am better acquainted with the Works of Genius that have lately appeared in *England*, than you are aware of. I am ſenſible that *Engliſh* Authors have, for ſome Years paſt, conformed to that Regularity and Correctneſs of which we ſet them the Example:

But

But it has happened, by I don't know what Fatality, that the exact Productions of your modern Writers fall infinitely ſhort of the leſs accurate Performances of their Anceſtors. Thoſe maſterly and ſublime Strokes, which are ſo juſtly admired in *Shakeſpear*, *Otway*, *Lee* and *Dryden*, have always remained unequalled by their more laborious Succeſſors; nor can all their ſtudied Correctneſs make up for their Deficiency in Genius and poetical Fire. I have, indeed, ſeen four of your late dramatic Pieces, which deſerve to be diſtinguiſhed from the many cold and unanimadverted Productions, which have appeared for ſome Years paſt on the *Britiſh* Stage, *viz. Barbaroſſa*, *Irene*, *Creuſa*, and the *Roman Father*. It may, indeed, be objected to the laſt-mentioned Piece, that 'tis little more than a Tranſlation of *les Horace's*, a celebrated Tragedy of *Corneille*. But,

Sir,

Sir, I ſhall always look upon a noble and ſpirited Tranſlation as a Work of greater Merit, than a cold and lifeleſs Original. Your Performance is but too much an Original, had you been contented to tranſlate my Piece from Beginning to Ending, as has been done with Reſpect to *Zara*, *Maira*, *Merope*, &c. you would have avoided many Inconſiſtencies and Extravagancies, tho' I do not pretend to ſay, that my Plan is free from Blemiſhes. You have ſhewn me one which I acknowledged and accounted for above. With Regard to your Objection againſt the Manner of ſaving the Orphan, by the tame Reſignation of another Infant, when the Subject afforded ſo fair an Opportunity of touching the Strugglings of a Parent upon ſo trying an Occaſion, and your chuſing to interweave the Father and the two young men in the Fable, my Reaſon for purſuing a different

different Conduct, was to avoid giving my Piece too great a Reſemblance to the *Heraclius* of *Corneille*, the happy Situations in which, and the moving Scenes ariſing therefrom, I deſpaired of being able to equal. That my Plan ſhould not eſcape your Cenſure does not ſeem ſurprizing, when you have not ſpared even the great *Corneille*. You have treated the Intrigue of *Heraclius* as a Riddle; 'tis true, it is extremely complicated, and too much embarraſſed, with a Variety of Circumſtances. But, Sir, the Plot of *Heraclius* may be unriddled by an attentive and diſcerning Spectator: 'Tis like a Labyrinth which has a Clue to guide thoſe that enter; whereas, your Plan repreſents a Labyrinth, wherein thoſe that enter muſt wander at random, ſeek for the guiding Clue of Reaſon in vain, and, at laſt, looſe themſelves in inextricable Abſurdity.

To-

Towards the Concluſion of your Letter, you modeſtly aſſert of the Author of the *Engliſh Orphan of China*, that he is one of the worſt Poets now in your Country: This Paſſage appears to me more liable to Exception than any in your whole Epiſtle. I make no Doubt, Sir, but every Reader when he comes to this Article, will be ſtrongly tempted to contradict the Author, and diſpute the Truth of his Aſſertion. I muſt own, Sir, I was at firſt inclined to think there might be a typographical Error in this Place, and ſhall beg Leave to propoſe to you the Reading that occurred to me, as a ſmall Return for the many obliging Obſervations which you have made upon me, and my Works, in this as well as other Writings of yours. The Emendation I ſhall propoſe, Sir, is as follows: I can aſſert, with truth, of the Author of the *Engliſh Orphan*, that he is the

worſt

worſt Poet now in this Country. If your Letter ſhould go thro' another Impreſſion, don't omit this Correction, it will add one Perfection to your Epiſtle, which it, at preſent, very much wants. I mean that of containing one inconteſtable and ſelf-evident Truth. After having, with great Modeſty, owned yourſelf to be one of the worſt Poets in *England*, you, with equal Politeneſs and Addreſs, pay a moſt artful Compliment to your Audience. It is true, indeed, (you tell us, that the Play has been received with uncommon Applauſe; ſurely that muſt be an undiſcerning Nation, that beſtows uncommon Applauſe upon a Piece wrote by one of their worſt Poets. But upon more maturely conſidering this Paſſage, I am inclined to call in queſtion your Sincerity, and to ſuſpect you of an affected Humility, as you have done by me. Whether your Motive be to

Honour to your Nation, I ſhall not take upon me to determine. Certain it is, that Poets often make uſe of theſe Expreſſions, as Beauties ſay, Methinks I look ſo hideouſly To-day: How like a Hag I look, *&c. &c. &c.* and both probably with the ſame Deſign. That the above Expreſſion is to be underſtood in this Manner, appears manifeſtly from what follows.---We are a generous Nation, and the fainteſt Approaches to Merit are ſure to meet with the warmeſt Encouragement: So, it ſeems, you at laſt throw off the Maſk of affected Modeſty, and avowedly put in your Claim to ſome Degree of Merit. How this Claim may be received by others, I know not; for my Part I ſhall always be of Opinion, that he that writes a bad Play makes but very faint Approaches to Merit. That your Patrons all know the Faults of your Piece, as well as if they

they had been diſcuſſed by the Academy of Belles Lettres, does not ſeem at all ſurprizing: The Inconſiſtencies, Improbabilities, and Abſurdities in the Plan, are ſo obvious and ſtriking, that they cannot eſcape any Perſon of common Diſcernment; and the Barbariſm and ridiculous Fuſtian of the Stile ſo groſs and palpable, that they muſt diſguſt all who are not entirely deſtitute of Taſte.

You proceed to extol the Scenery, and the Splendor which accompanied the whole Repreſentation, and tell me, with an Air of Triumph, that it ſurpaſſed the Magnificence of the *French* Theatre. I ſhall take your Word for this, Sir, and make no Scruple to allow, that the *Engliſh* Stage ſurpaſſes ours in this Reſpect. This is a Merit we will never diſpute with you. In *France*, Sir, we look upon rich Dreſſes, pompous De-

corations, Proceſſions, and the whole *Furberia della Scena*, as adventitious Helps, calculated for the Opera. Nay, 'tis highly probable, we ſhould not be ſo laviſh of them there, if our Muſic was not inſupportably inſipid. The *Italians*, whoſe Muſic requires no foreign Aid, are much more ſparing in this Reſpect. Our Pieces at the *French* Theatre ſtand or fall by their own Merit, and no ſuch Artifices are there ever made Uſe of. In a Word, Sir, I readily aſſent to the Eulogiums you beſtow on the Decorations of your Piece, and the Performance of the Players, as, in all human Probability, your ſo much boaſted Succeſs was owing to theſe two Circumſtances. But it is now high Time for me to draw to a Concluſion. I have already exceeded the Limits generally ſet to epiſtolary Addreſſes. As you conclude your petulant and ſcurrilous Letter with

an

an affected Politeneſs, and a forced Compliment, I ſhall conclude this Anſwer, which you have forced from me, by begging a Favour of you in my Turn, and making a Panegyric upon your Abilities as a Writer. Pray, Sir, do not imagine, that I have wrote this Anſwer, thro' an Opinion of your Importance, or on Account of any Uneaſineſs it gave me. No, I have often overlooked with contemptuous Neglect, the Attacks of Writers of a higher Claſs than you. The high Opinion I have of the *Engliſh* Nation, was the only Motive that impelled me to make this Reply. I could not bear to ſee my Sentiments, with Regard to their literary Merit, miſrepreſented in ſo diſingenuous and malignant a Manner. The Favour I have to beg of you, Sir, is, that you, who are ſo great a Maſter of the *Engliſh* Language, as well in Proſe as Verſe, would be pleaſed to look with Indulgence

gence upon the many Inaccuracies of Stile that may be found in an Epiſtle, wrote by a Foreigner, who paſt but two Years in your Country, and who has been ſo long out of it.

Songez que je vous parle une Langue etrangere.

This Indulgence, Sir, I flatter myſelf, will not be refuſed me by a Gentleman of your great Candour and Humanity. Farewel! remember me!

I have the Honour, SIR, of ſubſcribing myſelf,

Your moſt Obedient,

Humble Servant,

Geneva,
May —, 1759.

De Voltaire.

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